

Testimony

Senate Bill 2261

House Human Services Committee

Wednesday, February 23, 2005; 2:30 p.m.

North Dakota Department of Health

Good afternoon, Chairman Price and members of the House Human Services Committee. My name is Jill Leppert, and I am with North Dakota Department of Health's Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity. I am also the breastfeeding coordinator for the department's Special Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children – or the WIC Program, as it is more commonly called. I am here today to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2261.

The North Dakota Department of Health supports mothers in their efforts to breastfeed their babies. Research shows that breast milk is best for babies and that breastfeeding is necessary for healthy infants, children and mothers. In fact, breastfeeding is recognized as the optimal method for feeding a baby by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Dietetic Association, and the American Public Health Association.

According to national studies, feeding babies formula increases many health-related costs. Nationally, the cost of treating diseases and conditions preventable by breastfeeding is more than \$3.6 billion a year. Breast milk protects a baby against sudden infant death syndrome, juvenile diabetes, childhood cancer, ear infections, allergies, asthma, obesity and influenza.

Supporting a mother's choice to breastfeed her baby is essential to her success. This positive support must come from her family, her friends, her physician – and her community.

Mothers who breastfeed their babies in public places generally do so discreetly by using blankets and other means to ensure their privacy. Unfortunately, some mothers in North Dakota have faced resistance to their breastfeeding in public places. We have received reports from mothers who have been asked to stop breastfeeding their babies on airplanes and at malls, parks, swimming pools and restaurants.

Carrying breast milk in a bottle for use in feeding at a later time presents several problems for mothers and babies. For example, it is difficult to keep milk cold and then find a place to warm it. In addition, a delay in nursing can cause plugged milk ducts.

Also, a baby who breastfeeds and then bottle feeds may become confused and reject his or her mother, especially in the early months of breastfeeding.

The heart of Senate Bill 2261 is Section 4, which gives a woman the right to breastfeed her baby wherever she is otherwise authorized to be. As explained by Legislative Council, much of the other language is modeled after bills in other states and is included to make the intent of the legislation very clear.

If passed, this law would not be unique to North Dakota. In fact, 32 other states – including South Dakota, Iowa, Montana and Minnesota – have similar legislation. We ask that you pass Senate Bill 2261 to protect the rights of mothers to breastfeed their babies in North Dakota.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.